



Army Spc. James Mayer, a forward observer for the 5th Infantry Regiment, consults his Global Positioning System

locator as he recites his position to pilots during emergency close-air-support training in Afghanistan.

Airman teaches Soldiers to call for air support

FORWARD OPERATING BASE RIPLEY, Afghanistan — “Continue dry,” crackled through the radio as Army Spc. **Jarrold Stranahan** guided British pilots onto a target.

Specialist Stranahan, a forward observer for the 5th Infantry Regiment, is one of 20 Soldiers who participated in emergency close-air-support training recently.

Infantry units are taught to rely on the Air Force’s joint tactical air controllers when they need close-air support, but a controller may not always be available when Soldiers need one. In emergency situations, these Soldiers may have to call to pilots who will eliminate an enemy threat.

“I want to ensure these guys know proper communication procedures,” said 1st Lt. **Michael Colom**, the 25th Air Support Operations Squadron’s

air liaison officer to the 5th IR who led the training. “They need to know who to call, how to call and what to say.”

As an A-10 Thunderbolt II pilot, Lieutenant Colom said he knows what pilots are looking for. But as a liaison officer, he also knows what it means to be the person on the ground, guiding the pilots in.

“The purpose of this training is to teach the Soldiers how to help the pilots find what they’re talking about when they’re calling for close-air support,” he said.

As a platoon leader, 1st Lt. **Eric Hong** said he knows he’s the first one responsible for calling in close-air support if something were to happen to his tactical controller.

“When we’re on the ground, if our qualified person goes down, I’m the next in command to call for CAS,” said Lieutenant Hong, a platoon leader in the regiment’s Company B.

The training does not stop with him. Each of his squad leaders also participated in the training, and they will, in turn, train their Soldiers.

After practicing among themselves and scoping out targets with a laser range finder, the Soldiers selected targets and contacted British Harrier pilots. They took turns describing their targets to the pilots, giving the men in the air directions to accurately engage the target. They also spoke to A-10 pilots, which allowed the Soldiers to identify terminology used by different forces.

“This training has definitely helped me to understand that each pilot has a different way of talking,” said Staff Sgt. **Ben Johnson**, a Company B squad leader. “I know if I’m ever in the situation where I need to call for close-air support, I’ll be able to talk to any of them.”

Though they may never be called upon to use their newly acquired skills, the Soldiers said they are confident in their ability to do so.

“The more you know on the battlefield,” Sergeant Johnson said, “the better off you are.”

— Army Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl
17th Public Affairs Detachment